

HICKS GAP
CLASS II NATURAL-SCIENTIFIC STATE NATURAL AREA

COUNTY: Marion

7.5' QUADRANGLE: Wauhatchie

PHYSIOGRAPHIC PROVINCE: Cumberland Plateau

OWNERSHIP: State of Tennessee

ACREAGE: 350 Acres

YEAR DESIGNATED: 1989

DESCRIPTION: Hick's Gap is a 350-acre natural area in Marion County. The natural area occurs along the slopes of the Cumberland Plateau Escarpment in the Tennessee River Gorge just outside of Chattanooga. It is a part of the 26,000-acre Prentice Cooper State Forest and is adjacent to Tennessee River Gorge Trust property known as Kelley's Ferry Slopes. This area was designated because it, combined with Kelly's Ferry Slopes, supports the largest known population of the federally threatened large-flowered skullcap (*Scutellaria montana*). The upper slopes of Hicks Gap consist of a xeric (dry) to sub-xeric forest dominated by Virginia and shortleaf pines, with oaks and other hardwoods interspersed. The lower slope contains a mesic oak-hickory hardwood forest where white oak is prevalent. A dry somewhat open condition is optimum habitat for large-flowered skullcap.

While Hicks Gap is a small site, it is located within a large conservation area deep within the biologically rich Tennessee River Gorge. The gorge is also home to many archeological sites dating back 10,000 years. The Tennessee River Gorge Trust (a non-profit land trust organization) land and Prentice Cooper State Forest comprise approximately 50,000 acres of conservation land on the southern Cumberland Plateau in this area. The conservation of these and other public lands on the southern Cumberland Plateau, including TVA, National Park Service, and other state lands, has been critical in the recovery of the large-flowered skullcap. Because of this protection the large-flowered skullcap has recently been down-listed under the Federal Endangered Species Act by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service from endangered to threatened.

SITE MANAGEMENT: Prentice Cooper State Forest, P.O. Box 160, Hixson, TN 37343, phone (423) 634-3091 (<http://www.state.tn.us/agriculture/forestry/stateforests/7.html>); Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency Region III, 464 Industrial Blvd., Crossville, TN 38555, phone (931) 484-9571 (<http://www.state.tn.us/twra/>); Division of Natural Areas, 401 Church Street, 7th Floor L&C Annex, Nashville, TN 37243, phone (615) 532-0431; Division of Natural Areas – East TN Office, 3711 Middlebrook Pike, Knoxville, TN 37921, phone (865) 594-5601.

PUBLIC ACCESS: Public access is allowed but is limited, but no parking or hiking trails are provided at this time. The natural area is co-managed by the Division of Forestry and Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency. Public hunting is allowed. The natural area can be accessed via Hick's Gap Road.

DIRECTIONS: Hick's Gap is located between Chattanooga and Powell's Crossroads on Highway 27 (Suck Creek Road) about seven miles northwest of Chattanooga. Follow the signs for Prentice Cooper State Forest and proceed on the main forest road for approximately 10 miles to Hick's Gap Road on the left.